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A NEW CONVICTION OF SIN

I. THE MORAL MEANING OF THE WAR

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This article by Dr. Batten appeals to the conscience. Our readers may not agree with all that he says, but they cannot fail to be touched by the solemnity of the appeal and in that he is right. After this war no man need argue that there is a moral order in the universe. History proves it.

The world-war is the greatest calamity that has ever befallen the human race. Already some ten million men have been killed in battle, have died by wounds, or have been destroyed by hardship. Fully that number have been wounded or injured in various ways and are handicapped for life. At least fifty million men, women, and children already have lost their lives as a result of the war. This is serious enough, but it is only the beginning of the tragedy. The war is costing the nations billions of dollars, and little children for generations will be born under the shadow of this debt and will face a mortgaged future. Billions of money that ought to have gone for education, health, and human well-being must be spent to pay interest on these colossal debts. But even more tragic than this is the fact that millions of homes have been broken up and millions of children have been cheated out of a father's care and a child's chance in the world. This wrong against childhood is perhaps the blackest item in the indictment. But almost if not quite as dark is the fact that national enmities have been intensified; and for generations the men of one race will suspect and hate the men of other races. It is im-

possible for anyone to measure the magnitude of this great calamity.

This world-disaster raises some very serious questions. Why has this calamity come upon the world? Could not Christianity have prevented this war? Could not the churches have created a state of mind in Europe which would have made the war impossible? But many more searching questions are being asked concerning Divine Providence. Why did God permit this great war? And why has he permitted such outrages as have been committed in Belgium, in Armenia, in Serbia, and in Poland? Does not God care what is done on earth? If he cares, why does he remain silent? Some of the most earnest people in the world are carrying a heavy heart, and the most painful questions of all have to do with God's ways at this time. It is easy for men to charge God falsely in view of this calamity. And it is easy for other men, like Job's would-be comforters, to offer false excuses for God.

It is not my purpose here to attempt to justify the ways of God to himself or to the world. There are, however, some things with reference to this war which should be considered. The war is a revelation of the moral order of the universe,

and it offers an unparalleled opportunity to the church to interpret the moral values of life.

1. *The causes of the war.*—There is no mystery about the world-war. It has not come upon the nations without cause or warning. Nor should we confuse the causes of the war with the mere occasion.

The seeds of the present catastrophe have been sown broadcast over Europe and have been planted deep in the social order. For long generations the nations of the world have followed the policy of international aggression. They have envied one another's prosperity and have tried to checkmate one another's development. They have looked out upon the world and coveted the land of weaker peoples, and where it served their purpose they have taken it. They have erected tariff walls, have sought to control the seas and the strategic points of trade. At various times during the centuries the nations have been at war over questions of royal succession, territory, trade, or balance of power. Then diplomats and autocrats have met and played with the destiny of weaker peoples as though they were pawns on a chess-board. Financiers and bankers have coveted the resources of backward nations and have secured valuable privileges from weak and corrupt rulers. They have then used the power of the home nation to protect these privileges and subdue protesting peoples. These are some of the general causes and conditions which create a surcharged atmosphere and forebode a storm.

In a more concrete way, as an exaggeration of tendencies at work, we have the world-ambitions of Prussianism. It is impossible here to trace out the begin-

nings and developments of Pan-Germanism. But a few things may be noted. About a generation ago the dream of a German world-empire gained possession of a few men in Berlin. They then set out to infect the nation and create an imperialistic state of mind in the people. Germany had become an industrial and commercial nation, and it demanded room for expansion. It needed raw materials for manufacturing purposes, and it deliberately set out to appropriate these. Alsace-Lorraine contained large supplies of coal and iron; the Luxemburg-Lorraine district furnished from 60 to 80 per cent of the iron and steel produced. In addition, Belgium and Northern France produce more than 40,000,000 tons of coal per annum. In the petition to the imperial chancellor by the six great economic associations the representatives of the economic interests of Germany plainly say that the coal and iron resources of Northern France and Belgium must be taken by Germany "to secure Germany's naval, military, and economic power in the future." In the petition of the professors to the imperial chancellor we find this policy even more fully and unreservedly approved.

In her external policy Germany has sought to control the trade of the world. To realize their ambitions and control the trade of the world German traders developed the dream of a Pan-German empire extending from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf. By means of this empire Germany hoped to drive a wedge between Europe and Asia, break England's trade line to the East, and so control the strategic trade routes. This policy, should it succeed, would no doubt cripple the trade of Western Europe and

give Germany practical control of the eastern markets. This is only an illustration of a studied and determined policy on the part of Germany. And German militarists sat down and developed their plans, calculated their chances of success, anticipated the war with satisfaction, and rejoiced when the occasion at last presented itself. In all this we find the culmination and exaggeration of causes long at work.

2. *The war a judgment.*—The fundamental fact in judgment is revelation and disclosure. In this sense the war is a judgment upon the nations. For it is a revelation of the deeds of men and the moral quality of their lives. For generations the nations have sown the wind. It is inevitable that they should reap the whirlwind. Militarists and Junkers have had their ambitions and have sought to impose their ideals upon the people. To further their own schemes they have stirred up jealousy of other nations. These selfish interests have set to work to change the nations' ideals and to fill men's minds with notions of false patriotism. They have neglected God and his righteousness. They have sought to sanctify their schemes with a religious formalism and have pushed their plans in the name of a large patriotism. They have laughed at reproof and have sought to control the press, the churches, and the schools in the interest of their schemes. Men who opposed their plans were snubbed and ignored and suppressed. They were called pessimists, the opponents of progress, the enemies of the national ideal.

"They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind." "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a

man soweth that shall he also reap." Of old the nations have heard that truth preached; they have been told in stern lessons that this is a moral universe. But the nations have gone on their ways believing that they had outwitted God, flattering themselves with the delusion that they were the pets of Providence, and persuaded that he was too much interested in their progress even to call them to account. "Because judgment against their evil works was not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men were fully set in them to do evil."

"Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." There is no mystery about this war. It has not come upon the world without warning. Least of all has it come upon the nations without cause or explanation. It would have been a mystery if the war had not come. It would have been nothing less than a stultification of the divine law. In the case of the person, the sin and the penalty often come near together, and men can readily see the relation between them. In the case of nations the process moves slower, and so men think that the law has failed. We need to realize that God moves in a large orbit and does not balance accounts every night. A thousand years with him are but as one day. We judge by man's day and fancy that we have escaped the reckoning. But God always arrives. Judgment may be delayed, but soon or late judgment is set and the books are balanced. The fact that doom does not fall today does not mean that it will never fall. Nay, it means that it will be all the heavier when it comes. The non-intervention of God bears heavy interest. God is most to be feared when he seems to be doing

nothing. The books are always balanced, with interest added for delay.

Judgment is the great rectifier in the life of men and nations. It is a dreadful thing when judgment falls. Yes, but it would be a more dreadful thing if judgment never fell. That would mean a non-moral universe and an immoral God. In that case

The pillared firmament is rottenness
And earth's base built on stubble.

Suppose for a moment that the moral law were repealed and judgment never fell. Suppose that selfishness and greed could succeed. Suppose that the nations could sow suspicion and jealousy and prosper. Suppose that there had been for Europe no war, no crisis, no judgment. That were a tragedy and horror far beyond the present horror and hell. That would mean that moral distinctions have vanished, that nations can sow to the flesh and reap peace, that righteousness is a mere dream and God does not care.

The war is the judgment of God upon men and nations. It affirms once more the old law that whatsoever nations sow that shall they also reap. It has required this world-calamity to make this truth plain, and the war will not be in vain if it teaches men to heed this law and obey it. The war is the inevitable penalty that falls for national sins. It confirms the statement of Scripture "that the nations shall be turned into hell that forget God."

3. *The nature of sin.*—It has been shown by many students of modern wars that their chief causes are national ambitions driven on by economic motives. The Industrial Revolution, as it is called,

has had far-reaching consequences. Owing in large part to the multiplication of machinery, there has been a vast increase of material prosperity. The industrial nations have grown rich and have accumulated great stores of surplus capital. This capital naturally seeks investment where large returns are certain. As there was a surplus of capital at home and competition was keen, investors looked forth upon the world for profitable ventures. The most promising field seemed to be the development of natural resources of undeveloped countries. And so the capital is invested in weaker countries, usually in exploiting the people and their resources. In many cases the backward peoples of the earth have been so many hunting-grounds for world-traders and big financiers. It was surplus wealth that lured Great Britain into Egypt and led France into Morocco. It was surplus wealth that lured Germany into Mesopotamia and negotiated the Six Power loan in China. The causes of the European war are not far to seek. David Jayne Hill says:

Those causes run deep into the soil of trade rivalries. In outward form the causes of the war may seem to be the jealousies of peoples and the manoeuvring of diplomats. But at the bottom the causes were primarily business interests—markets, resources, trade routes. These were the issues. To settle them advantageously the sword was thrown into the scale, great armies were mustered and despatched upon their errand of hewing their way to the heart of opposing nations.¹

If there were no economic questions [he says again], the conflict of nationalities could soon be ended. Modern wars are primarily trade wars.²

¹ Hill, *The Rebuilding of Europe*, p. 80.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Thus the causes of the war are planted deep in the social and economic life of the nations. War is the expression of trade rivalries. National ambitions are really efforts to secure economic advantage. Modern imperialism is interested in loans, protectorates, trade routes, spheres of influence, the closed door, and financial interests.

But if we stopped here we should stop short of the deep moral truth. Here is where many students and socialists stop in their discussion of the war. But this is the point where the real work of the prophet and moralist begins. For behind the economic is the moral. What we call the economic and political factors are simply the outward and visible expression of spiritual forces and a moral will. "To the prophet," says George Adam Smith, "a nation's politics are not arbitrary; they are not dependent on the will of kings or the management of parties. They are the natural outcome of the nation's character. What the people are, that will their politics be.¹ It is the business of the church to recognize this profound truth, to go behind the economic and political to the heart and conscience of men, and by means of the woes of society to reveal the sinfulness of sin and emphasize the need of national repentance.

We have seen how for generations diplomats have played their game in secret and have disregarded the rights of the nations. We have seen how financiers and bankers have hatched their schemes and have sought to checkmate one another in world-markets. We have seen also how world-traders have exploited weaker peoples and have used the

power of government to control trade routes. These things have gone on for generations and have been done in broad daylight. Statesmen and church leaders have looked on, sometimes raising a feeble question, but too often giving a silent approval. Some of these schemes have miscarried, and men have regretted the mistakes made. Some of the schemes have roused other nations to the point of war, and men have regarded this as an incident in national expansion. And so they have gone on deceiving themselves and piling up material for the eventual explosion.

But now in the fatal consequences we see the deep damnation of the sin. We see now that behind the secret diplomacy of governments is the utter selfishness of men. We see that the ambitions of world-traders and the schemes of big capital were conceived in sin and born in iniquity. More than that, we see how the sin and selfishness of men run through the nation and implicate the whole people. We see how the selfish and sordid schemes of a few bankers and Junkers to exploit a weaker people and use the government as an agent bring war upon whole nations and drag down many innocent lives. In the glare of burning cities and desolated homes, in the presence of outraged women and murdered children, we see the deep damnation of sin and learn how far men have gone on the way to hell. Europe is in hell today because Europe has sinned. In the hell that is opened we read the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the need of avenging fires to burn away the evil. There is no mystery about the catastrophe that has befallen Europe. It is

¹ *Isaiah*, I, 224.

the inevitable result of sin; it is the Nemesis of outraged justice.

But let us not miss the deeper truth. The evil of sin is not to be measured in mere outward and visible suffering. The real evil of sin is found in the wrong state of mind and the very inveteracy of sin itself. To take a concrete illustration of the Great War—for generations militarists and Junkers in Germany have cherished their selfish plans, and professors and teachers have promulgated their theories and philosophies. They have taught with Hegel that the state is the realization of the spirit, the one vehicle through which the absolute reaches humanity; and so it is an end unto itself, an absolute fact whose welfare is the one law. They have applauded the words of the historian Mommsen bitterly denouncing the Hague Tribunal as a crime against universal history. They have acquiesced in the boasting of the Kaiser in sending his soldiers to China with the injunction to make the German name feared, so that no Chinese for a thousand years will look a German in the face. They have accepted the schemes of industrial leaders that the nation must expand and have coal and iron; and since these things were needed they must be taken from France. And now in the mind and will of present-day Germany we may see the most terrible penalty of sin. We see a nation that treads on sacred treaties as scraps of paper, that relies on frightfulness and outrage as legitimate weapons to terrify their enemies, that encourages submarine commanders to sink every ship without warning or leaving a trace, that drowns captured sailors, that shoots defenseless men, that strikes medals commemorating

the sinking of the "Lusitania" and the bombardment of unfortified towns. This state of mind, this Satanic will is the worst penalty of sin. The fact that men could think and do and approve such things is the very essence of hell. The wise old Greeks had seen into the heart of things when they said that Ubris, the spirit of insolence and pride, was the worst crime and was the very punishment of the gods. Let us remember that the worst thing about hell is not the pain and suffering; the essence of hell is the Satanic spirit which makes hell inevitable.

Sin is a matter of degrees. The blackness of sin depends upon the intensity of the light. In the past all the nations have been guilty of great wrongs against their weaker neighbors. There has been very little moral idealism in their international policies. But in these modern times the great nations have moved toward the light. They have tried to moralize international policies, to frame international laws, to limit armaments, and to find some way of securing more justice in the world. But one great nation has refused the modern light; it has preached the doctrine of national absolutism and has denied the truth of human brotherhood; it has glorified war and has threatened to bleed white its enemies. Sin is the refusal to advance to higher ground. It is the determination to live by the old policies when new ideals are rising. Sin is the effort to carry over into a higher stage the practices of the lower. We do not condemn cruelty and ruthlessness in a troglodyte. We brand them as infamies in civilized men. Germany is carrying to extreme the old policies of the nations. She in-

sists on perpetuating the Huns' methods in the face of Christendom. She is doing this in the new day in the presence of new ideals. That makes her sin so black and inexcusable. That brands her as an outlaw nation. That measures the depth of her sin and shame.

4. *The challenge to the church.*—This shows at once the duty and the opportunity of the churches. First, they must witness for God and for his moral order. The churches should have known and heeded the divine law; they should have taught it very plainly and made the nations know. They ought so to have taught it that the nations might learn the lesson at less cost. It is impossible for the churches of Europe to escape responsibility for this calamity. The churches have not given the nations a brave and faithful leadership. The churches have either not known what was going on in the nations, or they have been too weak and ineffective to voice a real protest. Leaders are expected to lead. Shepherds are commissioned to guard the flock and see that no harm comes to it. But look at the war-torn lands of Europe. The churches may well humble themselves and repent in dust and ashes.

For the present the duty of the churches is plain. They must understand the moral law and must make the nations know that God is not mocked, that whatsoever men sow that shall they also reap. This is a moral world. The foundations of the universe are laid in the bed rock of righteousness. Nations cannot sow the wind without reaping the whirlwind. The messenger of judgment may be staved off for a time and may be kept away for generations. But the writ

of summons gets served at last, and the account is balanced with heavy interest. In Europe or America the nations shall be cast into hell that forget God.

Secondly, the churches must create in men a discriminating and active conscience and must bring home to the nations a rational conviction of sin. They must see the essential nature of sin and must make men realize its deep damnation. They must so interpret the law of God and the relations of life that men shall have a great conviction of sin.

It is just here that the churches have failed most signally. They have had much to say about sin, but it has been sin in the abstract, sin as a doctrine, Adam's sin, inward sin. They have thundered on the minor sins of men and soft-pedaled on the major sins. What we need today is a church that will see the real, human, social wrong of sin, will trace it to its sources, and will show its infinite damage. The churches know how to denounce the obvious and disreputable sins, such as highway robbery, Sabbath desecration, wife-beating, and gambling. They do not fully see the deep damnation of such sins as financial greed, exploiting a defenseless people, murdering infants in insanitary slums, and working the life and hope out of men and women. They know how to see the connection between the poisoner and his victim, but they do not often see the relation between the schemes of a group of greedy bankers and the wrongs of the Hereros and the burning of Louvain. For thirty pieces of silver Judas Iscariot betrayed the Master to his enemies. For the sake of big business men are willing to encourage war scares and plunge the nations into war. Men are willing to

kill by shot and shell because they have killed by lovelessness and treachery.

But can the churches do this work? Will they do it? As a matter of fact many of those who sit in Moses' seat have neither the insight nor the courage for this work. They do not have the insight to track sin to its sources, to show its essential sinfulness, to pierce beneath the robe of respectability, to see the far-away and world-wise results. They do not have the imagination to see the connection between a group of speculators in London or Paris, in Berlin or New York, and a people robbed of its resources, driven into revolt, its children slain, its women outraged, its army treading homes under foot in utter ruthlessness. The churches, many of them, do not have the courage to testify against these respectable sins, to make men know that these things are hateful before high heaven, and that those who do such things cannot escape the judgment of hell. The churches must drag these sins, all sins, into the light; they must expose them, brand them, slay them with the sword of the spirit. All lawlessness is sin. Sin when it is finished brings forth death. Sin murders the individual. But even more it murders nations; it brings disaster upon society, it fills the earth with rapine and woe. Never again can we look upon it with indifference. From this time forth the church must set upon it the brand of Cain. There was never such an opportunity for a church with the insight of the prophet to witness for God and to bring a conviction of sin.

Thirdly, the churches must make men and nations know that they are their own doomsden; they must search for the

guilty parties and locate responsibility. Many men have beheld the woes of men and the tragedies of the war, and their hearts have been filled with bitter reproaches against heaven. Why does God permit these things? Does he not care what happens on earth? In all this men have charged God unjustly. They have failed to see that these woes are but the natural and necessary penalty of the nations' sins. Men's own doings have caused all this war and wreckage. That is the first thing to see, that the nations are reaping the whirlwind because they have sown the wind. "Penalties," says Thomas Carlyle, "quarrel not with the old phraseology; attend rather to the thing it means."

Why have men permitted this war? That is the real question which the nations must face. The responsibility for this awful tragedy must rest upon the rulers, civil and religious, of the nations. They cannot evade responsibility by talk about the irrepressible conflict, for men are the factors that cause the conflict. Least of all can they hide responsibility behind the mysterious ways of Providence, for men have sown the seed which produced this frightful harvest.

The duty of the church is therefore plain—it must search for the guilty parties and locate responsibility. This is stern, terrible work, I know. But then sin is a terrible fact and doom is a stern reality. This world-war has plunged the nations into a veritable hell. The lid is off the pit and hell is exposed in Europe. In the light of the hell that fills the world today do we read the deep damnation and exceeding sinfulness of sin. The churches must learn to set the brand of Cain upon the forehead of militarists and

war-makers, Junkers and rulers, who sow the seeds of war and murder the people of the world. This economic sin is not always due to selfishness and meanness. Some of it is due to plain ignorance. Much of it is due to crass stupidity. But after all it is a sin to be ignorant where knowledge is possible and the life of nations is in question. For the stupidity of rulers there is no remedy till the nations have learned the difference between gold and tinsel and accept only the brave and strong.

More than that, we must learn to know the men and interests most directly to blame. It is easy to blame diplomats and kings, and no doubt they must bear their share of responsibility. But after all, these are often but puppets in the hands of Junkers and capitalists. For, as we have seen, the real causes of war are economic; they are big business, which creates war scares and stirs up the people of one nation against another; they are war traders who exploit other peoples and employ the government as a collecting agency. At some future time men will see this. Then they will place responsibility where it belongs, and then they will know how to voice a moral judgment against such deeds. It may be said that many of the men most directly responsible for the war never intended that such disastrous results should befall the world. That may all be; some of them were too shortsighted to see. In that case we can simply say of them as was said of other parties in a tragedy: "They know not what they do." But other men were too much engrossed in their interests to care what befell others. According to tradition, Nero fiddled while Rome was burning.

And after all, these men expected to make rich war profits; so it was all clear gain. The blindness of sin is one of its tragedies. The inveteracy of sin is the penalty men pay for playing with sin.

Fourthly, the churches must interpret and enforce the law of human solidarity. "No man liveth to himself," says the apostle, "and no man dies to himself." This great truth is made very plain in the Scriptures. There we are shown how men and families are bound up together, and how no man can perish alone in his sin. We are shown how the sin of one man reaches through the generations and affects the life of every person. We know how the vices of the men who built the pyramids throw their shadows over far generations and bring heavy penalties. All history and science enforce this law. "I say," protests Carlyle, "there is not a red Indian hunting by Lake Winnipeg can quarrel with his squaw, but all the world must smart for it. Will not the price of beaver rise?"

In Europe rulers civil and religious have been weak and blind. World-traders and Junkers have formed their selfish plans. Cunning diplomats have woven their secret plots, and millions of innocent women and children must pay the forfeit and industrious workingmen must leave their families and go out to die in the trenches. This raises some puzzling questions—the old question of Abraham over Sodom—"Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Must the innocent perish with the guilty?" But the moment we realize the meaning and power of this law of solidarity things become plain. The nation is the moral unit. Men are bound up together in the one bundle of life. The deeds or mis-

deeds of one man never end with himself but have far-reaching consequences for good or ill. This intensifies tenfold the moral obligations of life. It is a summons to rulers and leaders to take heed to their ways, for they may murder a whole people. And it is a challenge to a people to know what kind of rulers it has and what they are doing. The people that accepts a false, cowardly, and selfish leadership is giving its own children to the slaughter.

The churches must lead men and nations to repentance and righteousness. "Sin well discovered is half cured." The world must return unto God and his righteousness before it can have real peace. The nations must have a new mind. They must renounce their evil heritage. There must be deep penitence for the past and sincere purpose for the future. Many of the advocates of peace are reversing the divine order: first righteousness, and after that also peace—"The fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and confidence forever." Here is a supreme opportunity for the churches to render a superlative service. They must bring to men a deep and searching conviction of sin. They must bring to men a deep and sincere conviction of righteousness. And they must lead them to a real and thoroughgoing repentance.

Finally the churches must keep alive in men the hope of the Kingdom of God and must inspire men to arise and seek that Kingdom. Too often the churches have forgotten this. And so they have upheld the present order and have tried to keep things fixed. They have feared

change; they have allowed great evils to remain unrebuked and unopposed because they feared to stir up antagonism. They have feared change when they should have feared the evils which made change imperative. And so again and again in times of social commotion the churches have taken sides with the forces of reaction against the people who were struggling for justice. Whereas the churches are here to witness against the present social order and to arouse men to seek a Kingdom that is to come. We stand for the present social order so far as it is just, and no farther. Is there injustice in society? Then the churches should know it and organize an opposition. Are governments and statesmen deceiving themselves and misleading the people by wrong policies? Then the churches must declare the right way and lead men into it. I know, of course, the hazard here. But the church that hesitates is lost. The prophet who fears to follow truth has sunk to the false prophet. The attempt to keep things fixed, to allow evils to pass unchallenged because we fear the confusion of destroying them, is itself contrary to Christianity and is the cause of disaster to men and nations. The Christian man never can be satisfied with things as they are. He looks above and beyond the present order, with its sin and misery, and seeks another order that is coming. Acquiescence in things as they are is treason against the Kingdom of God. It is false prophets who cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. It is true prophets who hunger after justice and cannot rest till justice is done.